

Matthew Petty from El Paso, Texas – Culture and Superstitions in Russia

http://exchanges.state.gov/media/youth/audio/nsli_111309_clips_petty.mp3

Matthew Petty:

Something clicked with me and Russian culture. I'm not really sure why I like it so much because it can be a discouraging culture for Americans. So, I really wasn't homesick. But I really didn't know what to expect for Russia. I think as Americans we have a general perception of it being cold, people never smiling, just a really dark place and in a sense that's true. The summer's the rainy season so it rains constantly and people don't smile at you whenever you walk down the street. Once you get into a, you know, familiar situation with family or friends then it's ok, and people do smile. But it's just the whole soviet notion and you can't blame them because it's part of their past and culture of individualism, even though they were viewed as a collective whole, they were still individual. And it might have been dangerous to interact with people during communism and so like they told us at the pre-departure orientation, you can't judge a culture just by the top of the ice-berg ñ what you can see ñ you have to understand the bottom which you can't see, the past. So once you understand the part of the iceberg that's underwater in Russian culture, you gain a real sense of, at least I did, a real sense of respect just because of what they've been through and how they lived their lives. Many superstitions exist in Russia. Tons of superstitions. Your family's way of caring for you is giving you advice about these superstitions. The advice is usually binding, so you can't do what you want because you're bound to what your babushka tells you about the superstitions. And they're outspoken about the superstitions, which is, it's quite amusing. You know, cold drinks are a big no-no. Even numbers are viewed as evil, and so flowers and presents must be given in odd numbers, unless it's for a female then you give them in even numbers.